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ABSTRACT

The preamble to Montana's constitution, which expresses gratitude for Montana's landscape, reflects an understanding that the political culture of a place is not something apart from the place itself. By the same token, the strengthening of political culture must take place and must be studied in the context of very specific places and the people who struggle to live well in such places. This book examines how a revival of public life and civic culture is happening or could happen, focusing first on the West and then more sharply on Montana and the author's home community of Missoula. Chapters 2-4 explore how our public life has been influenced by: (1) early constitutional debates in which Jefferson's notion of an educated citizenry engaged together in acting for the common good was overcome by the federalist "procedural republic" involving special interest groups and a system of checks and balances; (2) "public" education for citizenship in the context of the politics of American empire; and (3) the closing of the frontier. Chapters 5 and 6 contrast the current state of Montana politics, in which discussions and projects are repeatedly stalemated by territoriality and alienation, with earlier times, when the need for neighbors' help in a rugged environment promoted community cooperation and tolerance. The final chapters discuss how a more public life, based in practices that renew the recognition and commitment of community, might develop in the arenas of economics and politics. Contains 48 references and an index. (SV)

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